



Remarks

H.E. Jose Ramos Horta, Special Envoy of g7+

High-Level Plenary Opening of the Geneva Trade Week focus on Trade for Peace

Monday, 27 September 2021

Excellency Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala,

WTO Director-General

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

Greetings from Timor-Leste. I pray for Your wellbeing and happiness and of all around you.

On behalf of the g7+ group, I thank you for inviting me to share our views in the opening plenary of the Geneva Trade Week 2021. I commend the organizers of this forum which brings us together to share ideas on the nexus between Trade and Peace, the twin interrelated components for the g7+ group.

International Peace Day was commemorated a week ago against the dark background of the international community abysmal failure in rescuing the more than 1 billion people living in conflict affected countries where Peace is an elusive precious commodity. Their prayers for peace and wellbeing have gone unheeded. Wars and cyclical crises are so pervasive, almost a matter of routine, that there is hardly a family that has been spared. Generations have grown in wars and destitution. Despite the unmatched resilience of their people, these countries are labeled “fragile”, “failing” or “failed” states.

These so called “fragile states” have for decades and even centuries fuelled the engines of wealth of the industrialized nations with human and natural resources; yet they are home to the world’s poorest.

The sometimes invisible and forgotten colonization legacies, exacerbated by proxy wars, foreign aggressions and violent extremisms, overwhelm the brave peoples of these war torn countries who have shown extraordinary courage and resilience in the fight for lasting peace, democracy, self-reliance and development. Regime changes, foreign interference, and man-made and natural crises have become the recurring fate of these peoples.

The global norms and policies guiding development and stability have further proved unworkable for these countries. Too often international cooperation in peace and development has failed to achieve lasting social and economic development.

As if the litany of man-made and natural catastrophes have not suffice, there appeared the covid-19 pandemic and global recession that wiped out the gains of the last 20 years. Compounded by institutional and economic fragility, the impacts of covid-19 will last much longer in countries such as those in the G7+.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We tend to measure global development by aggregate social and economic indicators and hence we feel proud that our world has become more peaceful, stable and less poor and more equitable. This is partly true. For instance the main powers engaged in the two world wars of XX Century have not been in direct confrontation since 1945. These powers have developed on every aspect of life.

However, this is not true for conflict affected countries. They have instead become breeding ground for extreme poverty, battlefield for the cold war and subject to proxy wars and hence humanitarian and international peace missions with stratospheric cost tags. They are left furthest behind on all of these indicators. They are now on the opposite extreme of the development axis. Their citizens have been at the mercy of foreign aid despite living on untapped natural resources worth trillions of dollars.

Extreme inequality is rising among countries and regions. However globalized and interconnected our world has become we are deeply divided across social and economic standards. This can be nothing but the result of flawed international policies that have benefitted only few while depriving majority of others of the gains they are entitled to.

Therefore and against this background, I would like summarize in three points the shared perspective of g7+:

First. For decades, the right to equal and equitable participation of least developed and specially conflict affected countries in global trade and cooperation have been denied. Trade has remained the premise of few major global powers who have used multilateralism in trade and cooperation for the benefits of narrowly defined geo strategic ends. Multi-literalism can no more survive on the pretext of balance of power among the mighty nations. It can only prosper if it becomes more inclusive and equitable and hence truly multi-lateral. Therefore, we call upon the leadership at the World Trade Organization to pursue reforms in its policies that can be conducive to the true interests of world's least developed and conflict affected countries. We, the g7+ through the g7+ WTO accession group offer our assistance in providing our perspective that is representative of the context of 1.5 billion people.

Second. Peace and stability in conflict affected countries is a pre-condition for trade and hence development. Without peace, these countries cannot reap the fruits of trade and investment. Conflict in most of these countries is the product of interference and hegemonic quest by regional powers as much as it is the legacy of colonization and of internal factors. While realizing the polarization of politics among the global powers, we need them to truly recognize the rights to peace and stability of citizens of conflict affected countries in their own terms. In this globalized world, no one will be in peace until everyone is in peace!

Third and Final. Conflict affected and other least developed countries are rich in natural resources. However, their exploration has rarely resulted in job creation and hence economic development. Due to lack of stability, infrastructure, institutional capacity and resources, they are left behind in trade and hence economic prosperity. If they were to manage their resources effectively, they could sustain peace and stability and hence save the billions of dollars spent on humanitarian and peace missions every year. Therefore, international cooperation systems and policies should be reformed to become pro-peace and pro-stability for our countries.

In concluding a gentle reminder that the multi-lateral trade system was created on the promise of shared prosperity. It is truly a time to ask ourselves if we have honored that aspiration. I truly hope this question finds honest answer during the trade week.

Thank you!